

valuable perspective on spina bifida. After losing two pregnancies, the Liguori's were informed their unborn child had spina bifida. After careful consideration and information from the SBAA, the Liguori's elected to proceed with in utero surgery that could reduce the effects of spina bifida. Since the late 1990s, doctors at four U.S. hospitals have been operating before birth on babies diagnosed with spina bifida. By closing the spinal lesion early in pregnancy, these doctors believe they can minimize the damage created by fluid leaking from the spine, as well as by the spinal cord's contact with amniotic fluid. Surgeons have found that closing the hole in the spine in this fashion before birth may correct breathing problems in 15 percent of the children receiving the procedure and may reduce the need for a shunt to drain brain fluid build up by between 33 percent and 50 percent. While the in utero surgery was successful, their three-year-old son still requires extensive therapy and medical attention. Fred Liguori's testimony made it clear that a national spina bifida program is critically needed for the prevention of this condition and to improve the quality of life for those individuals and their families living with spina bifida. Fortunately, in fiscal year 2003, Congress was wise to provide \$2 million in funding to establish and support a national spina bifida program and is poised to provide a much-needed increase in funding for fiscal year 2004. The House provided a \$500,000 increase while the Senate included a total of \$3 million for the program for fiscal year 2004. I strongly urge my colleagues to support the Senate allocation as this level of funding is needed to ensure that the CDC has the resources necessary to support and expand its comprehensive efforts to prevent spina bifida, improve quality-of-life for those living with the condition, and to deliver important public health messages to those communities most at-risk for a spina bifida pregnancy.

I want also to recognize the special work of the Spina Bifida Association of America, SBAA, an organization that has helped people with spina bifida and their families for nearly 30 years, working every day—not just in the month of October—to prevent and reduce suffering from this devastating birth defect. The SBAA was founded in 1973 to address the needs of the individuals and families affected by and is currently the only national organization solely dedicated to advocating on behalf of the spina bifida community. As part of its service through 60 chapters in more than 100 communities across the country, the SBAA puts expecting parents in touch with families who have a child with spina bifida. These families answer questions and concerns and help guide expecting parents. The SBAA then works to provide lifelong support and assistance for affected children and their families.

Together the SBAA and the Spina Bifida Association of Connecticut,

SBAC, work tirelessly to help families meet the challenges and enjoy the rewards of raising their child. I would like to acknowledge and thank SBAA and the SBAC for all that they have done for the families affected by this birth defect, especially those living in my State. I would also like to commend the leadership of Hal Pote, President of the Spina Bifida Foundation—uncle of Greg Pote who lives with spina bifida, Alex Brodrick, President of the Spina Bifida Association of America, father of Joel Brodrick who lives with spina bifida, and Cindy Brownstein who serves as Chief Executive Officer of the SBAA. The spina bifida community and our Nation owe a tremendous debt to the SBAA for its work over the past three decades.

As a Nation, we have accomplished a great deal in our battle against birth defects. However, much more work remains to be done. I urge all of my colleagues and all Americans to endorse the important efforts to prevent spina bifida but also to support those already living with this often debilitating birth defect. Those living with spina bifida and their loved ones deserve our utmost support. It is my hope that by recognizing National Spina Bifida Awareness Month we can move closer to the laudable goal of eventually eliminating the suffering caused by this terrible birth defect.

#### NICS IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I bring the National Instant Criminal Background Check Improvement Act, formerly called the Our Lady of Peace Act, to the attention of my colleagues. On March 12, 2002, a priest and a parishioner were killed at the Our Lady of Peace Church in Lynbrook, NY, by a man who was able to obtain a gun despite the fact that he had a prior disqualifying mental health commitment and a restraining order that should have prevented him from purchasing a gun. The man who committed this double murder passed a Brady background check because the NICS database did not have the necessary information to determine that he was ineligible to purchase a firearm.

The NICS Improvement Act would provide funding to fix the hole in the current NICS background check system caused by the failure of many states to computerize and update their criminal history records. While the Brady check system currently provides fast responses to firearms dealers for over 90 percent of gun purchasers within a few minutes, responses are occasionally delayed because information concerning state and local convictions is not up-to-date or available. This can result in delays for some who lawfully seek to purchase a gun and the failure to block gun sales to some unlawful purchasers. To fix this problem States need adequate funding to input and update criminal history data. This bill would provide \$1 billion to help States do just that.

This is not a small problem. According to Americans for Gun Safety, 25 States have automated less than 60 percent of their criminal conviction records. Twenty States do not automate domestic violence or temporary restraining order records. This shortcoming in our public safety system, according to AGS statistics, has allowed over 10,000 prohibited buyers to obtain a gun because the background check could not be completed within the three business days as required by the law.

The NICS Improvement Act has been sponsored by Senators on both sides of the aisle, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### TRIBUTE TO ALTHEA GIBSON

• Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise today to mourn the loss of Althea Gibson, a sports legend in professional tennis and golf and a pioneer for African-Americans in all walks of life. Ms. Gibson passed away in East Orange this past Sunday after suffering from respiratory complications.

Althea Gibson was born on a cotton farm in Silver, SC, in 1927 but spent most of her childhood in Harlem, NY. She eventually moved to New Jersey.

At an early age, Althea Gibson showed great promise in sports. Her favorite was basketball but she excelled at table tennis, too. Musician Buddy Walker noticed her ability and gave her a tennis racket as a gift when she was 14. The harsh reality of racial segregation left her unable to play tennis on public courts while growing up. Fortunately, two prominent African-American doctors had a private tennis court and gave Ms. Gibson the opportunity to play tennis there.

By the early 1940s, Ms. Gibson began her tennis career as an amateur, playing in tournaments organized by the American Tennis Association, ATA, a predominantly African-American organization.

In 1947, she won the first of 10 straight ATA National Championships. Within a few years, Ms. Gibson was ready to compete outside of the ATA.

Her talent and record should have been sufficient for her to compete against white players in tournaments sanctioned by the United States Lawn Tennis Association, USLTA. But it took the help of Alice Marble, a champion tennis player herself, who wrote an article in American Lawn Tennis magazine. Ms. Marble noted that Gibson wasn't invited to participate in the USLTA championships for any reason other than "bigotry." Ms. Marble wrote, "I think it's time we face a few facts . . . If tennis is a game of ladies and gentlemen, it's time we acted in a gentle manner, not like sanctimonious hypocrites."

Ms. Gibson finally received an invitation to play in the 1950 National Tennis

Championships and made her historic debut at Forest Hills against Louise Brough, who had just won her third consecutive Ladies' Singles Championship at Wimbledon.

One year later, Ms. Gibson became the first African-American to compete at Wimbledon.

Between 1956 and 1958, she dominated the world of tennis, becoming the first African-American to win major tournaments, including the French Open singles and doubles, the Italian Open singles, Wimbledon singles and doubles, and the U.S. Open singles.

She was selected as the Associated Press Athlete of the Year in 1957 and again in 1958, the first African-American woman to be so honored.

Despite her success and fame, she encountered pernicious segregation throughout her career. Oftentimes when she competed at tournaments, she couldn't stay at the hotels the white players used, or join them for meals at restaurants. But her strength of character, her poise, and her determination carried her through such indignities. And she was gracious, too, writing in her autobiography, "I Always Wanted To Be Somebody": "If I made it, it's half because I was game enough to take a lot of punishment along the way and half because there were a lot of people who cared for me."

In 1958, Ms. Gibson retired from amateur tennis and began a short-lived career in professional basketball for the Harlem Globetrotters. She also pursued a professional career in golf, becoming the first African-American woman on the Ladies Professional Golf Association, LPGA, tour in 1962.

Over the years, Ms. Gibson received many awards and accolades. Some of her most esteemed awards were her induction into the National Lawn Tennis Association Hall of Fame, the International Tennis Hall of Fame, the Black Athletes Hall of Fame, and the International Sports Hall of Fame.

Just a few weeks ago I was eulogizing another New Jerseyan who broke the color barrier, my friend Larry Doby, who played baseball for the Cleveland Indians. What Larry Doby and Jackie Robinson did for baseball, what Jesse Owens did for track and field, Althea Gibson did for tennis. She paved the way for Arthur Ashe, Zina Garrison, and Venus and Serena Williams.

Althea Gibson could have rested on her laurels. But her work wasn't done when she retired from the world of professional sports. She was the New Jersey State Commissioner of Athletics for 10 years (the first African-American woman to hold the post) and served on both the New Jersey State Athletics Control Board and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness.

The Althea Gibson Foundation, created in her honor and based in Newark, NJ, lives on, helping urban youth develop their tennis and golf skills and improve their lot in life.

It is clear that the life Ms. Gibson led has served as an inspiration for Afri-

can-Americans and all people. While I am saddened by her death, I am glad that she graced us with her presence. Ms. Gibson taught each of us that "without struggle there can be no progress." She struggled, she succeeded, and we are all better for it.●

#### TRIBUTE TO DR. BARBARA LAZARUS

● Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to pay a special tribute to one of the true educational leaders of our time, Dr. Barbara Lazarus, whose contribution to expanding educational access for women and people of color has been immeasurable. It is not often that a single individual envisions how the world can be more just, has the talent to implement that vision, and conveys the passion that attracts others to the cause. Dr. Lazarus embodied all of these attributes and more, working tirelessly for inclusion and understanding.

Dr. Lazarus, an educational anthropologist, served as the associate provost for academic affairs at Carnegie Mellon University until her untimely death this past July. While at Carnegie Mellon, she became a nationally recognized leader in promoting women in science and engineering, and she won Carnegie Mellon's Doherty Prize, the university's highest honor for educational contributions. Dr. Lazarus touched the lives of hundreds of students and staff through her efforts to give women and minorities increased access to nontraditional occupations. Her commitment to promoting women and minorities in science and engineering has had an important impact throughout American higher education, as programs she created to overcome barriers have been replicated across the country.

Also concerned with reaching children, especially girls, she invented "Explanatoids," short lessons explaining the science behind everyday phenomena, from roller coasters to curve balls. This project, too, is being replicated at playgrounds and other institutions, including the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum.

Prior to joining Carnegie Mellon, Dr. Lazarus was the director of the Center for Women's Careers at Wellesley College where her groundbreaking work focused on the role of professional women in a global, multicultural society. She became the codirector and the only non-Asian member of the Asian Women's Institute Commission on Women and Work. In that capacity, she organized meetings in several Asian countries that brought together women scholars, government leaders, and activists to address the challenge of moving Asian women from traditional to nontraditional roles, particularly in the workplace.

Throughout her career, Dr. Lazarus wrote books, articles, and gave hundreds of talks to share her ideas and inspire others in this work. She will be

missed by her family, as well as the hundreds of friends, faculty, and students who were inspired by her counsel. And she will be missed by all of us for her significant contributions addressing important issues of our time, and general improvement of our human condition.●

#### LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2003

● Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. On May 1, 2003, Senator KENNEDY and I introduced the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, a bill that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

I would like to describe a terrible crime that occurred in Lincoln, RI. On August 28, 2000, Jesse Ousley, a gay teenager, was severely beaten by a police officer using antigay invectives. Ousley received a bloody nose, two black eyes, and numerous contusions, including marks on his neck, allegedly from the police officer's attempt to strangle him.

I believe that Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.●

#### IN RECOGNITION OF THE NAAMANS LITTLE LEAGUE

● Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator BIDEN and myself, I congratulate Coaches Joe Mascelli, Bob Waters and H.J. Lopes, and the Naamans Little League team. Their accomplishment of becoming the first Delaware team to reach the Little League World Series demonstrates the success that comes from hard work, perseverance, dedicated coaching, and the support of parents and fans.

The Little League World Series, held during the month of August in Williamsport, PA, ended a dramatic, record-breaking season for the Naamans Little League team. The Delaware State champions and Mid-Atlantic regional champions final overall record through district, state, regional, and world series play was 14-3. They finished their world series experience at 1-2, with a win over Iowa and losses to Arizona and Texas.

This year, the Mid-Atlantic Regional championship team consisted of 12 players: Jarad Carney, Kevin Czachorowski, Scott Dougherty, Cory Firmani, Constantine Fournaris, Danny Frate, Michael Julian, Zack Lopes, Tim Marcin, Dave Mastro, Vince Russomagno, and Kip Skibicki.

Coach Mascelli said his team gained a lot from this experience, both on the field and off the field. One of the highlights was the tremendous outpouring